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Averting Evil Eye

Tribal shaikhs, on the other hand, usually content themselves with one wife. In Kuwait, for instance, the ruler's Queen is a lady of the Al Subah. She is never divorced—such a thing would be a disgrace to the family as a whole. She remains the Shaikhah always. She magnanimously, however, allows the Shaikh Ibn Subah to take three other tribal wives, to amuse himself with, and to change them as often as he likes, provided he does not bring them into the town of Kuwait itself. They must remain in the desert. In this way her pride is satisfied. She remains the Queen. Here is an object lesson to the West.

At the birth of a child to a Badawin mother, a dagger, piece of steel, or even a needle or boffkin, must be placed in the cot or attached to the clothes of the baby. The mother cannot move the child without this piece of metal going with it. Iron or steel, is the thing that counts. Gold, etc., will not do. The idea is that it wards off the Evil Eye. The custom is universal among the *Murair*, *Dhafir*, *Shammar*, 'Ajman and 'Awazim tribes, and probably will be found to exist among all the desert tribes.

A woman is said to be *hâmila* or *hubla* when she is pregnant. She is said to have *walddat* or *khalfat* when the child is born. The term *khâna* is always used for the unborn child.

CIRCUMCISION

Among the Badawin circumcision is performed when the boy is between three and a half and seven years.

The operation is usually done by one who has had previous practice. The day is looked upon as a family holiday, and according to a man's means, guests and neighbours are invited to a meal, best clothes are donned, and the womenfolk dance among themselves till a late hour, except the mother, who runs away (*tinkash*) and hides herself. The boy is now a "proper Muslim".

The season for the circumcision ceremony is nearly always June (*al Sifâri*) when the *kârik* or dry north-west wind is blowing. The wound is supposed to heal quickly then. If the sea is near by, the boy is encouraged to bathe, the salty nature of the water acting as an antiseptic.

Among some Badawin the feasting of guests and neighbours goes on for the number of days that the boy has years, i.e. if he is six years

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old, feasting goes on for six days, if three years then three days, and so on.

Among Najd town-dwellers and in Kuwait city the ceremony is gone through with much more elaboration. Feasting and festivity continue for a full seven days before the actual ceremony. Women and girls seem to look upon the occasion as their particular feast. Every evening about 4 p.m. the women and children of the neighbourhood are invited by the mother and relatives of the boy to their house. Here refreshments, sherbet, coffee and sweetmeats are handed round, whilst singing, dancing and chanting go on. There are no men present, and any woman may dance as the spirit moves her. In Kuwait a band of some twenty-five negress minstrels, young and old, usually offer their services free, the entertainment being looked upon as a religious duty which brings luck in its train.

It is also not uncommon for half a dozen professional prostitutes to band together and come to the party unasked, to sing and dance and entertain the guests. Here again no fees are charged. The prostitutes believe that on such occasions they gain merit and favour from the Almighty by entertaining free of charge. The negress band and the gaily dressed prostitutes certainly give a dash of colour and gaiety to the proceedings and on these occasions no one, not even the most modest maiden, is shocked by the presence of her fallen sisters.

For seven days the entertainment and rejoicing continue, as a rule from about 4 p.m. to about 8 p.m. Then on the eighth day in the presence of the family circle only, the operator (in Kuwait he is known as *al Hindi*) arrives on the scene and with an ordinary razor cuts off the child's foreskin. His assistants are of course males, the father and one or two members of the family being the actual helpers. These assistants encourage the small boy to be brave and be "a man", and try to keep him cheerful to the end.

The mother as a rule goes off to a neighbour's house, as she cannot bear to see her son suffer. Apart from the mother, sisters, aunts and female slaves can be present, and one woman in particular acts as the child's comforter, as soon as the operation is over.

In 1933, whilst I was living in Kuwait, I was allowed to visit the house of our Muhammadan serving girl, on two occasions when the preliminary rejoicing and dancing were in full swing. It was very

[The circumcision of a young boy -- Analyst]

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black tents, moving about by the aid of donkeys which seem to form their only visible means of support. These Iraq Kaoliyahs are thieves, bad characters, fortune-tellers, are versed in the art of palmistry of sorts, and last but not least their women are in demand for performing the operation of "circumcision of female babies", a rite which is widely practised in Southern Iraq, and among the Montafiq tribes of the Euphrates and Bani Tamim Arabs.

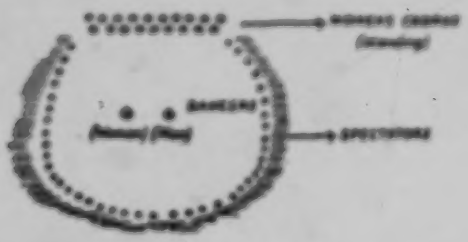
DESCRIPTION OF A SUBBA DANCE

(seen on 3rd June, 1934, at Kuwait)

The dance took place in the Subbha Encampment near Qasr Nasf just inside the Nasf Gate. The occasion was the three days' feasting preceding the circumcision of a male child. For two days dancing had taken place, but the third day was reserved for the best and biggest show.

The usual cross with half a woman's *shaal* hanging to it or draped over it was in its place over the tent which was rejoicing, a sign to all and everyone that a dance was to take place.

The chief performer and master of ceremonies combined was an elderly man whose child had just been circumcised. He entered the arena formed by Subbhas male and female and other onlookers, waving a sword round his head and inviting the Subbhi maidens and Subbhi braves to come and join him. Presently, after marching round the human circle several times, there was a stir and from a



neighbouring tent a pretty young lass decked out in her festal garments (saffron, violet or green covered with her voile *shaal*), dashed into the circle, bare-headed and bare-faced with her tresses all undone

and blowing in the breeze. A pretty sight she was, for her hair was long and rich, and her face comely, and chin and neck tattooed all over in pretty patterns. The girl's appearance was the sign for her brother or husband to run into the circle and embrace her, lightly kissing her on the lips (a sort of sign of encouragement no doubt). The girl was then given a cane and the man, with several shrill war-whoops, started dancing before and away from her, all the time facing her, however. As the dance started, the choir consisting of a dozen Sukkhi women started a staccato shout, clapping their hands the while.

The dance was continued by other young men and maidens entering the ring and carrying on as above described. At times several men and women were in the ring together. There was nothing indecent about the behaviour of the dancers, except when the old man with the sword once or twice danced behind his partner in rather suggestive manner. He was the one exception to a perfectly decorous performance. Of the eight or nine maidens who danced, several were distinctly comely—two in particular had remarkably fine hair shining a golden red in the sun from constant treatment with henna. *Ye awajyil, ye awajyil* ("Come and dance"), was often repeated between dances by the tough old Master of Ceremonies.

During the dance the girl appeared to act the following: She was pursuing her male dancing partner opposite, and trying to make him come to her. He from retiring in the first place, and acting the part of a shy lover, would eventually succumb to his lady's charms, and would start advancing and showing his admiration by his every movement. Next his girl would start retiring, having won her point, but should the admirer come too near or try and touch her, she would strike him lightly with her cane and force him to beat a retreat.

The man with the sword danced sometimes on one foot and sometimes on the other, but would suddenly start dancing up and down on both feet in rubber-like fashion. The girl danced as most Badawin women do, on the flat of both feet, jumping up and down with stiff legs, and advancing and retiring before her man. As she danced, she nodded her head vigorously, keeping time with her feet, in the direction of the man, but every now and then she varied it by swinging her tresses round and round her head by sideways and circular movements of her head. Throughout the dancing the girl never smiled, but

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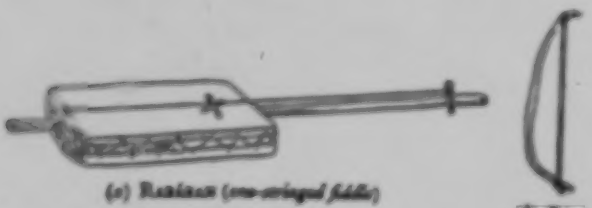
632 632a 632b keeps her lips tightly shut, and occasionally placed her hand over her nose and mouth. If the male dancer approached her, as he did on several occasions in rather "loud" fashion, the girl struck him lightly with her cane as if to drive him back. A feature was the girl's rouged lips, and a bright saffron-coloured streak half an inch broad down the centre parting of her hair. They all had this, and it looked like saffron paint (probably strong solution of henna). The dance ended by the girl's brother rushing into the ring and covering his sister's head and face with a portion of her voile garment, and taking her away.

THE RABÁBAH

633 The *rabábah*, or Badawin guitar, was once universally used among the Badawin tribes of Arabia. The minstrels were men of an inferior tribe, or of the servant class, such as Sanas and the like. With the spread of Wahhabism and the rise of the fanatical 'Ikhwan in 1919, the decree went forth that the *rabábah* was a sign of sin, and it was



(*a*) Rabábah (*one-stringed fiddle*) (*b*) Bow

banned entirely. The Northern Shammar, Dhafir and 'Anizah tribes, who were scarcely affected by the puritan revival, still continued to use the *rabábah* freely, getting the servants and retainers to play for them, and with the collapse of 'Ikhwanism after the rebellion and defeat of Faisal al Duwish in 1930, listening to the *rabábah* and the singing of war and love songs by the Sana sections of the tribes, appears to be once again slowly taking hold. To-day, 1937, some of the Rashaida, Hirshan and 'Awazim are definitely taking to it again. The Sukhkha and Kauliyah (Gipsies of Iraq) have always used it, even in the days of ultra-Wahhabism, and perhaps this is why it was considered the instrument of the low-born.

634 635 To accompany women and girls dancing, only a chorus of women